



PRIVATE LAND/PUBLIC WILDLIFE COUNCIL
July 13 – 14, 2020
Helena, MT



**PRIVATE LAND/
PUBLIC WILDLIFE COUNCIL**

Meeting convened remotely at 1 PM via Zoom.

Council Members Present: Richard Stuker, Ed Beall, Ed Bukoskey, Cindy Cohan, Lee Cornwell, Dr. Daniel Fiehrer, Rep. Denley Loge, Carl Zabrocki, Dale Tribby.

Council Members Absent: Sen. Duane Ankney

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Personnel Present: Kammi McClain, Admin Support; Jason Kool, Access Bureau Chief; Ron Jendro, Legislative Liaison; Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator; Dustin Ramoie, FAS coordinator; Quentin Kujala, Chief of Staff; Martha Williams, Director

I. Welcome

Jason began the meeting by welcoming the group and thanking them for their patience with this new meeting format. Then he discussed the plan for the day's agenda. First on the agenda was an informational presentation regarding wildlife migration and movement. The next agenda item was to discuss concerns and issues from previous PLPW meetings to more clearly define a workplan for the rest of the year.

II. Informational Updates

i. Wildlife Migration and Movement

Quentin Kujala gave the group a brief overview of the topic of wildlife migration and FWP's current strategies regarding migration. When we speak about wildlife migration and movement, we are talking about the movement of wildlife across the landscape for various resources. He also gave an overview of DOI Secretarial order 3362. This order directed the Department of Interior to work with eleven western states to conserve winter ranges and migration corridors for pronghorn elk and mule deer. In response to this order, the state of Montana identified research needs and five priority areas.

The PLPW council then heard from other parties involved with this discussion. Scott Laird, the Montana representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, spoke about the how his organization came to be. He spoke to different symposiums that were held in 2018 and the role that FWP played at those symposiums. At one of those meetings, Scott's organization got to look at the strategic plan developed by FWP. From that meeting, came all kinds of project work: fencing, weed work, communication with local landowners, etc. in those focal areas. The purpose of the coalition is to work with the staff of FWP to take the collaring data and all the other work that is

going on in those focal areas to produce long term guidance to the department, so that we can address wildlife migration and movement as part of every day business. The coalition spoke to the regions and wildlife managers about conservation, migration and movement in the regions. The regions offered great feedback, and the coalition submitted some ideas to the department about how to make this a long-term effort. Scott believes that the PLPW council is a good forum for landowners and others to share concerns about this issue.

Cole Mannix spoke about his experience as a landowner and as a representative as the Western Landowners Alliance. Western Landowners alliance is full of landowners who invest substantially in land health and take pride in the wildlife that our lands support. They have heard from landowners across the state that we may be able to help with regards to wildlife movement. One thing is funds to help retrofit fences to be wildlife friendly, cost of brucellosis quarantine, secretarial order brings resources to the state on this topic. National Fish and Wildlife foundation that they have invested in a western ranch grant program. We believe this group is well positioned to help with this issue. We would like to ask the council to explore the issue in the state. Between now and the next meeting, we would like the council to explore perspectives of various groups on migration and how the state handles migration. We would like to ask that at the fall meeting you consider hosting a panel of representatives from within the communities of those five focal areas. Based on that panel to consider any recommendations for policy, management or funding that may come to light.

The council is interested in exploring the ways they can help and interested in potentially hosting a panel. They are especially interested in speaking with local people in the five focal areas. The council also discussed current efforts to help with migration and movement such as fencing, and passages developed for wildlife.

III. Work Planning

The first topic covered in the PLPW work planning session was a conversation about the increase in the purchase of hunting and fishing supplies during the pandemic. There will likely be a bump in Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds. The group then looked at a list of topics and priorities that had been discussed at previous meetings. The PLPW council asked for a brief update of the elk plan process. Quentin offered a general update about that the planning process; the citizen's group is almost fully assembled, and the meeting dates have been postponed due to the pandemic.

Ron Jendro mentioned that PLPW needs to prepare anything they would like to put before the EQC before the September EQC meeting. Trespass penalties (hunting without permission) were discussed as something to look at for possible legislation with an increase in fines and the possible loss of hunting privileges. Also, the group spoke about hunter behavior. Hunter behavior is always a priority for landowners. The council is still looking for a way to improve hunter awareness about hunter behavior beyond hunter education. They also briefly discussed the payment cap and hunter day payment for block management. The council would also like the revisit and reconsider the PALA frameworks.

In response to the hunter behavior concern, Jason spoke to revising our current billboard campaign. Currently, we have Ask for Access billboards, and we can change those to focus more on hunter behavior. We can have billboards for not driving on muddy roads, closing gates, etc. The group also talked more about coming up with a video that highlights hunter behavior issues and how to be courteous to landowners. Another potential legislative change is to give the authority to approve HB 454 agreements back to the commission rather than the department. Finally, the group discussed a potential change to landowner preference possibly reducing the number of acres required based on a history of game damage.

Day 1 adjourned at 5 PM and Day 2 convened at 8:30 AM

IV. Trap Lines

Dale Tribby: It is quiet right now. We are currently in that time between last season and before folks start thinking about next fall.

Ed Beall: The fishing industry is picking up nationally. There has been a huge surge in fishing tackle purchases because of the stay at home orders. Folks have been having trouble applying online for permit drawings. Customers have asking about their antelope tags and wondering when they can buy over the counter B tags for shoulder hunts. Otherwise, the spring hunting seasons have been pretty calm.

Richard Stuker: The biggest thing that has happened in my area, is a few weeks ago a male grizzly bear was seen as far as Big Sandy and north. The grizzly bears are moving this way fairly rapidly. FWP kept track of the bear for quite a while, and he moved from Loma to Big Sandy further north. I haven't heard anything else lately about this bear. He had gotten into a chicken coop and some pet food. Lot of people are out fishing. On the commission, the Madison is a big issue, and the issue is getting worse with an increase in anglers due to COVID-19.

Ed Bukoskey:

Round here Far West Fishing access had a black bear get in a beehive; think it was relocated. Also on Mills Creek another black bear, grasshoppers quite a few young pheasants also sandhill crane nest pretty quiet around here.

Denley Loge: This year many people are saying they've been seeing an increase in bears compared to years back. We have a lot of timber management activities. With our lower numbers of elk in recent years, part of that is due to habitat. We should see better elk habitat come back with the timber sales going on. The Forest Service has been selling more maps with more tourists coming in this year. Clark Fork River is full of fisherman all the time. Wolves seem to be dominating more than the elk and the deer. Region 1 and the western part of Region 2 are hoping for different wolf management in their area.

Cindy Cohan: Like to thank the FWP and everyone who helped us get more land over there on Mt. Haggin. That is great, and they removed some of the fencing there. More fencing to be removed this Friday. Sportsman group will help with that. Still involved with the Madison and concerned about that and the Crazies.

Lee Cornwell: Abundant amount of moisture last fall, most everyone should have a crop. Doesn't look like we have too many grasshoppers. There is a ditch that brings water from near Glacier Park over to the milk river. We started the irrigation season, and it supplies about half the water, one of the big drops failed. Believe all of the drops should be up and functional this summer. Whitetails are starting to come back, and pheasants look like they are going to have a good hatch.

V. PALA

Jason began the conversation thanking FWP staff for their work on getting PALA off the ground. Many folks involved: comm ed, legal, access coordinators, fisheries. Jason explained how the process worked for an application in process:

- Landowner submits an application with all complete required documents
- Regional FWP staff work with Regional review committee to review the application materials, determine project eligibility, score the project and establish an estimate value for the project. Staff also work with the landowner to determine what improvements are necessary and establish a

potential price.

- Projects were examined by legal to determine eligibility and reviewed by the FWP hunting access coordinators and bureau chief as well as fisheries private lands fishing access program coordinator for consistency.
- Price presented to the landowner to gauge level of interest of participation in the program.
- If landowner agrees, project presented to PLPW for their recommendation.
- The Director then reviews PLPW recommendation on whether to extend an agreement to the landowner.

The council looked at 27 potential PALA projects that met all steps including due diligence efforts to determine if there was existing public access and made their recommendations. While looking through these applications, the council voiced some concerns and made several observations. Some of the projects included in the proposals offered access through their BMA property, and the PALA agreement wouldn't result in new public access for hunting but may provide year-round recreational opportunity.

Some projects PLPW did decide to recommend as a goodwill decision to maintain a good relationship with the landowner. Through this discussion, they also decided they would like to reevaluate their scoring and assessment criteria for the 2021 season.

There were some properties that PLPW felt were scored too high, so they recommended the score be adjusted and so the payment decreased with that new score. Another property only added a small opportunity, but because it was motorized the compensation was higher than the group would like. However, PLPW acknowledged they had drafted the scoring criteria and payment and that is what the Department.

Eventually the group decided to approve all but one of the projects for this year, but they would like to revisit the criteria for next year. There were also a few landowners that wanted multi year agreements; the council recommended keeping the agreements to one year only until the scoring criteria can be revised.

The council looked at an agreement that proposed some improvements for the landowner. They decided they would not want to recommend any improvements to be funded on one-year agreements. In the end, the council funded most of the twenty-seven agreements with some changes and recommended that a few projects not be funded.

Meeting adjourned at 1:30 PM